A Youth of Fire and Soil
By Jonathan Olvera

In my youth, the competitions of natural sports and charm pageants were not always as fulfilling as the time I spent reading—closely observing the natural patterns of communication and interpretation.

The prizes of my time were the same: furs and squirrels. Nothing shiny. Nothing made in factories. Just what we could gather, craft, and share.

I cherished the bold medical experiments made possible through young medical students with the right utensils, who worked to make even the most common day a worthwhile effort. Their hands, nervous but eager, held scalpels and solutions as if each one could make a miracle happen.

Staying at home and reading the Bible, I made a fertile grasp at understanding what the market and university studies meant—what they offered in the order of programs and socialism, all in the name of keeping any useful information. Some of it made sense to me. Some of it drifted above my head like clouds too high to touch. But I kept reading. I kept trying.

The natural world, to me, was a delightful playground—especially when I chose to obey the directives given by our pastors and teachers. I found God's voice not just in scripture, but in the chirp of crickets, the rhythm of rainfall, and the fierce stillness of the mountains.

Common quarters were the rule. Sharing space meant sharing stories, too—of hardship, of survival, of gratitude. Planning for resource availability and modification was a natural pastime. There was no waste, and every drop of water had purpose.

Colors were a frustrating puzzle. I was never ashamed of the color of my own skin, although the plight of public shame and humiliation felt like a disease. It was not contagious by breath, but by ignorance. Even as a child, I could feel its weight in the room, even if no words were spoken.

Still, I knew in myself that the fate of one to another was to die from old age. Still, it became difficult to interpret the intentions of others, given their productivity and use of mathematics. People treated success like it was a formula: the right clothes, the right grades, the right voice. But I knew life wasn't math. It was music. It was a mystery.

Faith was always there. Logic sometimes fails.

Yet I felt enlightened—familiar with the Word—knowing by observation the truth of life. My eyes became my teachers. My hands, my proof.

Life was more complicated than I could interpret or understand, but that never stopped me from trying.

The angels and trees whispered a new message every day. They danced a song in the flames of the sun and under the moon. I would often sit alone near the mesquite trees and listen. The branches swayed like dancers, and sometimes I imagined they were telling stories from faraway lands.

There was always the need to satisfy the local hunger for a steel trade. The horrid nature of collecting that resource—the blackened hands, the broken backs—left scars on the body and mind. But it fed families. It paved roads. It gave children shoes.

I grew stronger in character. I needed to work and become an honest, hardworking individual. Each season taught me something new about effort, about patience, about the beauty of seeing something grow—whether it was a crop or a person.

There was nothing that was going to stop me or get in my way. Not then, and not now.

The passages of this life are many, and the demands of the villages weigh heavily on the feet and hands that labor. But I never saw labor as punishment. I saw it as part of the dance—the slow rhythm of creation and contribution.

My youth was a delight, though I was not spared discomfort. I always needed to know more—more about food, agriculture, and the production of the precious resources that shaped our scenery and culture.

I remember planting seeds with my bare hands, feeling the warmth of the soil as the sun hit my back. Each sprout that broke through the ground reminded me that even the buried can rise again.

It was the norm for me to honor this passage, to respect tradition, and to make the best of bad situations using prayer and fasting. Hunger made the prayers feel more urgent. Fasting sharpened my focus. It was never about punishment—it was about clarity.

I learned to honor my parents and maintain never-ending respect for my neighbors. Their kindness was my inheritance. Their stories, my guideposts.

Sometimes, life gives us hunger and thirst. It takes more than it gives.

It challenges us to hunt, to work in unlikable places. But when a person listens—and has faith in the better—one step forward always leads to another.

I have seen broken things be mended. I have seen barren places bloom. I have seen people rise when the world gave them every reason to fall.

The wind still tells stories. The trees still sway in rhythm. The sun still scorches, and the moon still cools.

My life began with questions—but it continues in answers.

Answers found not in textbooks, but in toil. Not in fame, but in faith. Not in comfort, but in character.

And so I walk still—feet dusted from the desert, eyes lifted to the sky, hands ready to work, and heart ready to believe.